

FEBRUARY 2, 1984

Charge-offs against the bad winter spell are beginning to bit the Shortgrass Country. Pump and windmill parts are back-ordered; cow doctors are experiencing a lively trade in sick calves and anemic cattle. Herders are still walking like they had on overboots and heavy clothes. On the warm afternoons of 60 degrees or more, a slight flutter in their systems could put them on salt tablets to avoid artificial attacks of beat exhaustion.

The winter has been too much. Unless we get some warm days and moisture in February, March alone is going to last 62 days. But any time a ranch country leaves the fall without any grass, winter is going to be endless. I do think that the guys that have thrown away their calendar watches are being a bit over dramatic; at least they are willing to start to face the times.

The opening markets have been encouraging on lambs and calves. Fat cattle in particular are 10 bucks a hundredweight higher than this time last year. I suspect all cow and calf operators are watching for the subsidized dairy cattle to sink the packer trade. Word is out that Mexico might absorb some of the surplus milk stock. Should that happen, all previous definitions of Pan-American friendship could be overturned by huge margins as far as the beef cattle people are concerned.

Funny, I never thought milk cows were going to be our downfall. Imported meat or high taxes, maybe, but milk cows seemed like more of a threat to a cowboy's liberty than his income. Milk cows symbolized the past when everybody had to start home in the middle of the afternoon to be back at the ranch to milk that night. I always thought that was the reason dancing started at 9 o'clock and ended, after midnight so folks could take care of milking their old cows.

Even though I wish the dairy people and the big hamburger chains weren't going to make a big score on the program, I can sure sympathize with their surplus. In 1946, an old kid and myself took care of two milk cows for my boss. We had enough milk to pour out to feed a small orphanage. Butter was selling for two bits a pound in Mertzon; however bachelor kitchens wouldn't qualify for the market. In spite of all the milk and cream and working after dark, we'd never have thought of complaining to the government about our problems. I guess the world just wasn't so sophisticated in those days. At least I'm sure that sunburned milk maids lacked that characteristic.

Perhaps the dairy subsidy will strike soon. The suspense is awful. One thing for sure, our cattle aren't giving any extra milk.